

SELF AND SOCIETY

Producer v. Consumer

Thoughts on Difficulties

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1928

ERNEST BENN LIMITED
BOUVERIE HOUSE FLEET STREET

*Printed and Made in Great Britain by the
Co-operative Wholesale Society Ltd., Longsight, Manchester*

Producer v. Consumer

IT would seem that there is something quarrelsome in our natures which necessitates our division into camps or classes or parties; that there will always be Radicals and Tories, natives and foreigners, poor and rich, labour and capital, and so on. Many of these divisions are becoming thinner as civilisation advances; all of them are in a way artificial, and some of them quite illogical. There is, however, one division which can be made which is a real division, never absent from human affairs. There will always be producers and consumers, and the interests of each must always clash. By dividing society into these two categories, we also avoid many of the causes of misunderstanding so common in all the other methods of division, for we are each of us a consumer and a producer. The conflict between the two classes goes on within the breast of the single individual, and everyone, therefore, is capable of understanding both sides of the case, with the result that society should be able to do justice between the two contentions.

There is an introductory difficulty to the consideration of the conflict between producers and consumers caused by the limited interpretation that is frequently put upon the term "producer." We are far too prone to accept the Marxian theory, and many of us who would be offended if we were called

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Socialists act and think as if we believed that wealth was really labour applied to land. Production is a much more complicated process than any devotee of the labour idea is willing to admit, and it is indeed hard to find, even among the idle rich, those who do not perform some function essential to production. It may well be that some people produce more than they consume, and others consume more than they produce; and there may be a very great deal still to be done before inequalities of this kind are removed from amongst us. But producing is not confined to labour by hand, or even labour by brain. Producing is an extraordinarily complex process involving the work of many individuals, varying all the way from the moneylender at the one end to the dock labourer at the other. Wealth consists, as Mill taught us, "of things useful and agreeable having exchange value," and those people who contribute in any way to the creation of an exchange value are just as important, and sometimes even more important, than the man who does the physical work of making the thing itself. Thus the man who finds a way of selling Japanese umbrellas in England, or English lace in Fiji, is just as much a producer for the purposes of our present argument as is the most skilful miner. Or again, to get the idea of production quite right in our minds, we must remember that the man who sings a good song or preaches a good sermon is quite properly classed as a producer with a definite claim, in return for his song or sermon, upon the products of others.

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The science of economics is full of wisdom on the relative position of consumer and producer. The law of supply and demand has been discussed and debated in that meticulously technical way which is proper to the economist until there is little more to be known about it, and yet it seems to me that there is something to be said and something more to be understood before the whole problem of consumption and production has been fully covered. Economics, to be useful in a practical world, must be mixed with a little psychology, while ethical considerations should override both. It is the difficulty of getting these constituent elements in the finished article of human happiness properly mixed in right proportions that constitute the science of sociology and the problems of politics. It is, of course, impossible that at any given time the whole of the people may reach such proficiency in the technicalities of economics or psychology or ethics, to say nothing of all three, to be able to formulate and agree upon an all-wise policy which would produce an all-perfect world. But in striving, as everybody must and does strive, day by day to reach out towards the perfect world, it is necessary that everyone of us should have at least an inkling of the way that these various sciences affect the problems with which, day by day, we have to deal.

Education teaches how much there is to learn, and the most perfectly educated man is one who knows how dreadfully ignorant he is. As political education spreads amongst us we shall be afflicted with rather less of the cocksure type of reformer, who, having

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acquainted himself with some of the details, proceeds to handle the whole of the problem with all the confidence of ignorance.

In this little pamphlet, therefore, I shall endeavour to set out in the briefest possible way just a few—and not more than a few—of the difficulties as I see them, hoping to do no more than by emphasising difficulties to strengthen in the minds of my readers that sense of responsibility which Tennyson had in mind when he wrote:—

“ There lives more faith in honest doubt,
Believe me, than in half the creeds.”

The Need for Balance.

Human affairs are a matter of balance. The bigot is a person who has never learnt this truth. We are all and always dependent upon the existence of opposing forces pulling in many and opposite directions, and thus maintaining an equilibrium in which we can exist. There is gravity all the time pulling down, balanced by other forces keeping us up. There is the rain wetting and the sun drying, each of them undoing the work of the other, and both of them essential. Wherever we look, the same phenomenon appears. There is the speaker making a noise and the listener keeping quiet—one quite ineffective without the other. The writer and the reader provide us with another illustration of the same rule of balance. Two opposite ideas opposing and yet co-operating. The borrower and the lender, and even the teacher and the taught.

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Just as there is the need of balance, produced by opposition, in the affairs of people generally, so we find this same balance and opposition in the forces working within the single individual. We are completely dependent in all circumstances upon a knowledge of right and wrong, of pleasure and pain, and so on. We could get no enjoyment out of right, no satisfaction out of pleasure, without a knowledge of both wrong and pain. An attempt to discuss all these questions lands us very rapidly into an almost unknown and largely unexplored borderland where we meet the paradoxical notion that while forces must oppose to secure a balance on which we depend, yet that very opposition constitutes in itself a sort of co-operation or working together, and it is easy to get confused when we think of opposition co-operating. A good deal of confusion does exist to-day, notably in connection with the splendid efforts that are being made by so many people in the realm of industrial peace. It is said, and rightly said, that buyer and seller have a common interest, but grave damage may be done if from that difficult truth an attempt is made to get buyer and seller both pulling in the same direction.

The need for balance and opposition is seen much more clearly when we consider the position of the citizen and the State. The interests of the citizen must in some ways be entirely different from the interests of the State; and it is all important for the maintenance of a healthy State and a happy citizen that there should be the two sets of interest pulling

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in opposite directions and thus maintaining the essential balance. When we come to the interests of sections, or classes of citizens, and the interests of the State as a whole, we can see the divergence or the opposition even better still. It is, for example, quite obviously in the interests of hollow-ware manufacturers to make the price of hollow-ware as high as possible, or of bricklayers to get from the rest of us the maximum of the good things of life in return for the service of laying a brick. The interests of these classes are wrapped up in scarcity, but the interests of society as a whole are wrapped up in plenty. Society wants a lot of bricks, the bricklayer wants a few bricks, and because of this opposition of view, justice will normally be done as between the bricklayer and society. We go right off the rails, however, when we say, as large numbers of people now do, that society should adopt the point of view of the bricklayer. There is nothing wrong about the efforts of any man or any class to secure a maximum price provided that society sees the need for a pull in the opposite direction on the part of the rest of us.

Puzzle and Paradox.

Pursuing this line of thought leads us to all sorts of puzzle and paradox. The question, for instance, of right and wrong. There is never any doubt as to what is right and what is wrong from the point of view of the single individual, but there is always great doubt when we study these matters from the point of view of the community as a whole. What

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is right from one point of view may be wrong from another, and what is right at one time may be entirely wrong at another time. It is right to take your clothes off in the bathroom, and wrong to do so in the street. It is right to give a child a chocolate after dinner, but it is wrong to give the same child the same chocolate just before it ought to be eating the potatoes. It is right to pay for a job when it is done; it may be wrong to pay for the same job before it is done. When a man jumps overboard, it is right to lower the lifeboat and to try to save him, but it would be utterly wrong for a man to expect the lifeboat and to jump overboard in order to see whether it was working efficiently. It is right to give assistance to failure, but quite wrong of failure to regard assistance as a right—a thought which has been overlooked in most modern political arrangements. It is quite right of *you* to suppose that I am dependent upon my fellows, but it is right of *me* to regard my fellows as even more dependent upon me.

From these simple and hardly debatable propositions we can move on to more difficult specimens of the paradox and puzzle which we find in most human affairs. It is, as I see it, quite erroneous to suppose that a system or plan of society can be devised in which everybody agrees that things are right, or that if such a society were to be brought into existence it would ever work or last.

I have in mind a dear old lady, typical of many of us, who always took the "opposite" view. If a

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window was open she found the room cold and asked for it to be closed. If the window was closed, she found the room stuffy and demanded that it should be opened. In the case of that particular old lady—and she was a very dear old lady—her family developed a perfect system. If they wanted the window open, they would close it before she entered the room. If, on the other hand, they desired the window to be shut, they would see that it was opened before she arrived.

The difficulty of distinguishing between right and wrong is in no way better seen than in the normal, natural, ordinary attitude of buyer and seller. "It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer; but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth." The buyer—every buyer—quite deliberately lies when buying. That is, of course, far too strong a statement, but I quite deliberately lie to make my point. What else can the buyer do? If I go to a buyer of books with a novel that I have published and offer it to him for 7s. 6d. and he replies: "How very kind of you. I am so glad that you published that book; I have long waited for it. Do let me have it as soon as you can. I think it is awfully good of you to have gone to the trouble of publishing the book for 7s. 6d."—what would be the state of the book market? Without doubt, the next book I published would be 12s. 6d., and would not be such a good book. Instead of this the buyer tells me that he wishes I wouldn't publish so many books, that he has more books than he can read, that the price of the book is an outrage

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and he cannot afford it, and I really ought to be ashamed of myself for the extortion represented by the 7s. 6d.—with the result that I publish only books which I believe to be good, and I publish them at the lowest price that is compatible with my personal solvency. The normal buyer must say “No,” however much he wants an article that is offered to him. Unless he said “No,” he would never hear anything about the article. He would rob the seller of all those opportunities to explain, demonstrate, and argue, which are quite essential to a proper understanding, by the buyer, of the article which he proposes to acquire.

There is a much more difficult puzzle to be found in the question of the mines and the miners, so much to the front to-day. Nobody can question that in a free country and a properly constituted society four miners are quite entitled to band themselves together and to say that they will do the work of three. Nobody can deny them the right to decline to go down the pit unless all four go together, even though it may be admitted that three of them could quite well perform everything that was necessary. But because we overlook the need for balance and opposition, we place ourselves as a society in a very ludicrous position. Most of us sympathise with the miners; many of us deliberately accept their point of view and actively support their demands in so far as votes, resolutions, newspaper articles, or any other sort of political action can be called support. But whatever we do in this way, whatever we say

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about it, whatever we think about it, we never take the least notice of our own convictions in our practice. I have never heard of anybody going to a coal merchant, or to a coal mine, and offering to buy coal at above the market price. We may vote for the mine, but when we go out shopping we buy oil, or use gas, or turn on the electricity.

War Within Ourselves.

There are, and there must be, as we have seen, two distinct and opposing forces always working in the circumstances within the breasts of each one of us. Human life is a struggle with natural weakness, and we each of us have to strive to balance that which we want with that which we have to give. We cannot get away from this struggle; there is no escape from it. We may flatter ourselves on platforms about our altruism or our sense of service, and this flattery may help us to carry on the struggle, but it does not remove it. There is always the tendency with everyone to get as much as he can and to give as little as he can. A great deal of nonsense on this question is talked by those who are ignorant enough to know exactly how to solve the industrial problem. There is, of course, a good deal of joy in work—more joy in some sort of work than in others. There are a great many people who love work for work's sake, but it is somewhat doubtful whether even those people, or many of them, would do the work without the overriding necessity of the struggle for existence. Some jobs, no doubt, are so interesting as to absorb us and attract

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but they are quite definitely in the minority. I think I can claim to possess a fairly developed sense of duty, and to keep my nose to the grindstone at least as successfully as some, but I am sure that I am not free from that struggle of opposing forces which affects each one of us. I have been coming to the city for nearly forty years and have a pretty good record of daily attendances, but I have never known the morning when I felt really fit enough to come. I am a heavy sleeper; I sometimes find it difficult to get to sleep, but always ten times more difficult to awaken; and if I were free from the need for struggle, I do not believe, however tempting the work may be, that I should have been coming to the city for forty days, let alone forty years. More simple illustrations of the war within ourselves, which is an essential part of the make-up of human existence, are to be found in the control of the appetites.

We are awfully fond of deceiving ourselves. It might be said that we take the greatest delight in dishonesty in thought. We continually deceive ourselves as to our own motives, and we are continually wrong as to the motives of others. We go to the theatre not so much because we want to, but to please the wife, while the wife goes in a spirit of self-sacrifice because she thinks that it is good for the husband to have an evening at the theatre. We play a game of golf not because we like the game, but because it is good for our health. I know hundreds of golfers, but very few who deliberately indulge in the game for the sake of the game and

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because they like it. If the conversation of the average golfer is to be believed, he plays because his doctor tells him to, or because he feels the need for exercise, or because it will enable him to do something else the better. We subscribed to War Loans to win the war, not for the 5 per cent which they offered; but it is certain that our patriotism would not have stood the test of a $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. Those people who are so eloquent in their descriptions of the motives of others, especially the motives which actuate various classes of society, would do well, or so it seems to me, to take more time to ponder over their own motives and to endeavour to discover which of the many opposing forces within them really gets the mastery and controls their actions.

Poverty.

Politics and all questions of citizenship are for the most part simply variations of the problem of poverty. Society, as a whole, is interested to remove poverty. Nine out of ten of all the Acts of Parliament and all the public and corporate Acts which we undertake have for their ostensible object the alleviation of poverty in one or other of its many forms, and yet very little thought is given to a study of the nature of poverty. I have heard many hundreds of speeches on scores of proposals to increase the wealth of the world and to deal with the scourge of poverty, and I am always struck with the absence of any serious attempt on a big scale to promote an understanding of poverty, to define it, to secure a general realisation

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of what poverty really is. The best definition that I can give of poverty is "the absence of things." Poverty is not a question of money, although, from the individual point of view, money is all important. You cannot eat money; you cannot wear money; money won't keep the rain off. If you distribute money, as is so commonly done by the politicians, you only put up prices, as is very clearly seen in the recent history of houses. The same house within ten years has varied in price from £300 to £1,200, simply because the politicians have endeavoured to solve the housing problem with money. Houses are made of bricks—not money, or even votes. People are far too much inclined to consider the problem of poverty from a personal point of view. They forget that need for balance and opposition to which we have referred. But poverty as a problem for society is another thing from poverty as a problem for some single individual. Suppose we consider what would be necessary in order to wipe out from our midst, as we exist to-day, the scourge of poverty. We should need at once to provide vast masses of commodities. Huge quantities of a lot of little things—not the things that are usually talked about on political platforms, but simply little homely things, the absence of which causes people to be poor. Things such as, for instance, a mutton chop, a flannel shirt, a good comfortable bed, or a week at the seaside. These are the things that poor people need, and some of them cannot get. Remembering all the time that we are looking at the matter from the point of view of society as a whole,

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it cannot be suggested that there is any appreciable quantity of mutton in the world that is not eaten in due time and season; nobody imagines that there is a store of flannel hidden somewhere that might provide all the poor with all the flannel shirts that they require; nor have I heard anybody charge the capitalists with concealing somewhere a stock of bedding to defeat the desires of the working class. Or again, consider what would happen if forty million people in England alone tried to get to the seaside for a week! When poverty is examined in this practical, matter-of-fact, and wholesale way, it becomes as clear as daylight that the trouble arises from the absence of things, and that there has been a failure on the part of the producers to provide the means to abolish poverty. The consumers cannot help with the problem except in so far—and it is surely very limited—as they may be able to consume rather less and share the saving with others; but consuming less won't help with mutton chops and flannel shirts, for nobody can pretend that those wealthy consumers, the favourite butt of the politicians, eat more mutton or use more flannel than they ought to do.

The wealth that exists is really, when examined, very little good to us in dealing with this problem of poverty. That, I believe, is where the politicians as a class go wrong. They pile up the taxes, they multiply the figures, they collect and distribute money or its equivalent, and, failing to understand that poverty is the absence of things, very little happens.

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The dividing idea, which at one time was the basis of Socialism, is dying slowly, but dying very surely. It is, of course, quite natural for a poor man to think that he would be better off if he could share a bank account with a wealthy neighbour. It is not only natural, but it is true, which reminds us again of this balance and opposition idea that I keep stressing. The transference of a bank balance from one man to another takes a certain amount of purchasing power out of one pair of hands and puts it into another. It makes one man poor and another rich. It may remove a personal injustice here and there, but it does not add a single mutton chop or a single flannel shirt to the wealth of the community, and does nothing whatever to tackle in a practical way the problem of poverty considered as a problem for society as a whole.

But at this juncture it may be appropriate to point out that a very great deal of the wealth which the politicians propose to divide, and which they are always attempting to tax and distribute, is quite incapable of division or of distribution. We must get out of the habit of thinking of wealth in figures, and must remember that it consists in things. Typical examples of such wealth are a Rolls Royce car, a stall at the theatre, or the *Alice in Wonderland* manuscript, which was sold the other day for £16,000. It is quite impossible to divide a Rolls Royce car. It is possible to take the man who is sitting in the car and put him in the gutter, and take another man out of the gutter and put him in the car, thus sub-

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stituting one injustice for another, but doing nothing whatever to deal with the problem of poverty. To rob a wealthy man of the means of paying for a stall at the theatre simply leaves the stall empty and places the theatre in difficulties. It does not prevent him seeing the play, or enable anybody else to see the play. When we come to such wealth as that represented in the *Alice in Wonderland* manuscript, the futility of division is obvious, and yet the £16,000, which is the figure, or cipher, or tally, representing that manuscript, is calmly counted up by the politicians and offered to the poor as a way out of their difficulties !

Poverty must be considered as a question of things ; we must remember that money is nothing but a medium of exchange and is quite useless apart from the things which are exchanged, and then we begin to see that poverty is absolutely and entirely and exclusively a problem of production.

“ One of the chief advantages derived by the present generation from the improvement and diffusion of philosophy,” says Dr. Johnson, “ is deliverance from unnecessary terrors and exemption from false alarms. The unusual appearances, whether regular or accidental, which once spread consternation over ages of ignorance, are now the recreations of inquisitive security. The sun is no more lamented when it is eclipsed than when it sets, and meteors play their coruscations without prognostic or prediction.

“ The advancement of political knowledge may be

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expected to produce in time the like effects. Causeless discontent and seditious violence will grow less frequent and less formidable, as the science of government is better ascertained, by a diligent study of the theory of man.

“ It is not indeed to be expected that physical and political truth should meet with equal acceptance, or gain ground upon the world with equal facility. The notions of the naturalist find mankind in a state of neutrality, or at worst have nothing to encounter but prejudice and vanity; prejudice without malignity, and vanity without interest. But the politician’s improvements are opposed by every passion that can exclude conviction or suppress it; by ambition, by avarice, by hope and by terror, by public faction and private animosity.

“ It is evident, whatever be the cause, that this Nation, with all its renown for speculation and for learning, has yet made little proficiency in civil wisdom. We are still so much unacquainted with our own state, and so unskilful in the pursuit of happiness, that we shudder without danger, complain without grievances, and suffer our quiet to be disturbed and our commerce to be interrupted by an opposition to the Government, raised only by interest and supported only by clamour, which yet has so far prevailed upon ignorance and timidity that many favour it as reasonable and many dread it as powerful ”

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Production the Only Remedy.

It is commonly supposed that people produce for profit, that industry is carried on for gain, and that people work for wages—all of which is true up to a point, but only up to a point. The individual, whether as a capitalist or as a labourer, no doubt has uppermost in his mind the immediate and personal gain which he hopes to secure from some action taken or some work done; but looking at the matter in that larger way which is proper to the student of economics interested in the welfare of society, it becomes evident that the individual view of the particular worker at any special moment is of very minor importance. Doing the right thing even with the wrong motives does not always pay the person who does it. The right thing is done in the interests of society as a whole, whatever the individual may think about it. This rather paradoxical position is seen very clearly if we consider some of our leading industries and think of the service or disservice which they have rendered, within our experience, to society as a whole.

The doctrine of production is nowhere better justified than in the engineering industry, although that industry is at the time of writing under a cloud and most of the engineers themselves are on short time and shorter pay. Engineering as an industry has always accepted machinery. It has always believed in speed, and engineers, to a man, have never failed to welcome any improvement, any device, which would give them less labour for the

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same product, or more product for the same labour. A stupendous amount of real wealth has been spread over the whole community in consequence of the point of view adopted by the engineers. Our great-grandfathers moved themselves about on their legs for the most part; on an average they enjoyed three rides in some sort of vehicle each year of their lives. To-day every man, woman, and child in the land takes on an average three rides per week in trains, tubes, buses, and now aeroplanes. Three rides a week constitute no greater tax upon the wealth of all of us than did the three rides a year which our grandfathers enjoyed. We jump into a tube and pay a penny and make full use of a machine which has cost millions to create, but we do not, I fear, as we should, whenever we put down our penny, utter a word of thanks to our engineering colleagues to whom all these wonders are due. We are all of us ever so much better off because the engineers have done their duty, but the engineers have nothing very much to be thankful for, because other classes have failed to follow their example and have adopted an anti-social policy.

Consider next the case of the builders—not only the bricklayers, but the merchants, the contractors, the manufacturers of supplies, and the whole range of building material producers. It is surely not too much to say that as a class they represent the quintessence of selfishness. The building industry contains no machinery; it is free from anything that our grandfathers would recognise as competition;

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it abhors speed, and to a man it denies the doctrine of production. Note the results. The builders, for the time being, are fairly well off, no class has received better comparative wages in recent years; but the engineers and every other class are short of houses. The country is afflicted with a housing problem, getting, as I think, worse and worse and suffering inconvenience, the whole of which can be charged to the account of the builder. Housing is not dependent upon the state of foreign markets; it has next to nothing to do with import or export; it is a home industry, carried on for the most part with home-made material, and there are no outside influences to hinder any development of housing that we care to have, except the attitude of the builders themselves—an attitude which, strange as it may seem, most of us aid and abet. All these things become very simple when they are considered in a wholesale way, and looked at as a question for the whole of society.

There are, of course, many difficulties and complications which arise as soon as one leaves this high pedestal and comes down to detail. Over-production and unemployment are obvious difficulties, but may it not be that in stressing the danger of over-production from the point of view of some little class or section, we have developed far greater dangers of under-consumption from the point of view of society as a whole? If we were faced with the alternative of the bankruptcy of the building industry, or a shortage of houses for all the rest, surely society

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would be wise to accept the first rather than the second difficulty, especially when it is remembered that if the brains of the building industry were thus forced to apply themselves to the problems of economy instead of devoting themselves entirely to the safeguarding of their own interests, there might after all be no bankruptcy at all.

Liberty.

I have left until the last the consideration of what is perhaps the most difficult of the many difficulties which beset the student of social and economic problems. We all like to talk and think about liberty; we all pay lip-service to liberty; but very few of us bother to consider what we really mean by the term, or whether, indeed, there is such a thing as liberty at all. Nobody can entertain any doubt as to the possibility of securing political liberty. Recent legislation may leave details here and there unfinished, but we are very near to the point when every man and woman amongst us has complete political liberty, based upon complete political equality. Neither can anyone doubt the feasibility of religious liberty. We are, I suppose, as free as is humanly possible to follow the dictates of our individual consciences in matters of religion. But we also talk of economic liberty, and this is surely much more difficult. It is gravely to be doubted whether any such thing exists. The term "wage slavery" is not now used so commonly as thirty years ago, but it is still widely held that the

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receiver of a wage parts with a liberty which he might in some other system of society retain. On reflection, however, it may appear that in seeking, as so many of us do, to find a way of freeing ourselves from the chains of slavery as wage-earners or producers, we may only be forging for ourselves heavier and more irksome shackles as consumers. If we are all both producers and consumers, it really would not appear to matter very much. Our producer-selves must be slaves to our consumer-selves, or our consumer-selves must be under the domination of our producer-selves. Seeing, however, that we never produce for ourselves, but always for somebody else, the thing is rather more complicated, and it does matter whether we submit to the domination of the persons for whom we produce, or whether, as consumers, we prefer to be under the domination of those who produce for us. One thing does seem to be quite evident. While we may secure economic liberty as producers or as consumers, we cannot have it both ways, and the other half of us must be in a position of slavery or subjection.

We have to choose whether we prefer to stand in the market place to be hired or to stand in the queue to be rationed. That is an alternative from which there is no escape and which suggests that there can be no such thing as economic liberty. The question rather would seem to be which sort of economic slavery is the better. Consider for a moment the Socialist position, which is perfectly good in theory, "from each according to his abilities, to each

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according to his needs." We should, as I understand it, all produce what we decide to produce, and the total product would be divided amongst us. The opposing view doubts, and, as I think, doubts with complete wisdom, whether in any such system there would be any production to ration. History has yet to provide a case where producers have secured power and failed to use it to rob the rest; witness our building friends, to whom reference has just been made. It does not matter whether we examine cases of rings, or combines, or trade unions, experience is quite uniform. Wherever producers have secured any power, they have used it to limit production, to enhance prices, and, in a word, to rob the rest of us. Power in the hands of producers has never been employed except to limit the wealth of the whole community. No force known to economic science or to experience, except the force of competition, has ever done anything to keep producers in order, and without competition they have always contrived to limit their production and to diminish their contribution to the commonwealth. In, therefore, arranging society with producers on top, in accepting the alternative of rationing to that of hiring, we are deliberately flouting all that history and our knowledge of man teaches us, and we run straight into the risk that such a society will produce nothing to consume.

The other alternative of standing in the market place to be hired can be examined in a much more satisfactory way, because we know so much more

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about it. It is the basis upon which civilisation has hitherto relied; it is the foundation upon which our industries and our commerce have been built. It has its weaknesses and drawbacks and disadvantages, but it has never failed to produce the goods. Examined in the light of theory, it will stand the test. On the hiring basis, the "wage-slave" basis, the industry of the world has been created, the population of our own country alone has been multiplied by four, and the miracle of providing each one of us, however poor, with much more than we could of ourselves secure from nature, has been accomplished. A liberty, as consumers, greater and wider than ever entered into the wildest dreams of our forefathers, has been secured to each of us—a liberty which it would surely be very stupid to discard in favour of a nebulous liberty as producers, which, when secured, might prove to be useless to us.

If this argument is reduced to the simplest and meanest terms, we still find that we are wise in considering consumers rather than producers. The man who works eight hours out of twenty-four is quite obviously one-third producer and two-thirds consumer. If that same man has a wife and three children to support out of his eight hours of work, his personal interest is composed of fourteen parts of consumer interest and one part of producer interest.

The greatest of all modern follies is seen when the false idea of bolstering up a producer interest is widened to include not only the man but the machine, and when output is limited or reduced by both man

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and machine. That stupid notion overlooks the new truth, which has yet to be fully understood, that the wage-slave is slowly but surely giving place to the machine-slave.

If we could go forward with unanimity, determined to secure for all the fullest degree of consumer-liberty, recognising the need and the wisdom of "producer-slavery," the "slavery" would diminish as the liberty increased, for no one can doubt that, were we agreed on all these questions and able to work without restraint or limitation, were we to utilise to the full the possibilities of scientific power now available to us, a very much shorter day and a very much diminished effort on the part of each would suffice to give us all the consumer enjoyment and liberty which we desire.

In those circumstances we should get rid of a good many false ideas which are floating about to-day. We should return quite frankly to the old servility of the seller or producer, an economic quality which has almost gone from us. We live in a generation where shop assistants, railway porters, waiters, and bus conductors, and most of the producers with whom we come into contact, are totally ignorant of their real economic function, completely unaware of their obligation to serve, and puffed up with an ignorance of economics which renders a great deal of their work ineffective and makes the rest of it disagreeable to both server and served. But here again we come up against a number of curious paradoxes which make it very hard to be dogmatic,

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even if that were one's desire. The servility of the seller wants using with discretion, and, of course, with dignity. It is an essential quality in a shop assistant, a quality all too rare to-day. Personally, I leave my shopping to others because I have not the sweetness of character which enables me to submit to the snobbish indifference of the average modern shopkeeper. But there are some shopkeepers who must not be servile. The banker keeps a shop to lend money; the banker's existence depends upon the borrower; unless he lends he cannot live, but no one would desire that the banker should adopt an attitude of servility to the borrower. Indeed, he very wisely adopts the opposite position. But it is foolish for a bookseller to ape the manners of the banker. The bookseller is no more dependent upon the sale of a book than the banker upon the pleasure of the borrower, but the bookseller must go out of his way to attract the buyer, while the banker is under a different sort of obligation.

The folly of chasing producer-liberty is seen very clearly in the cases of one or two of our leading industries. The railwaymen have for years been so busy getting liberty that they have nearly lost the railways. Twenty-five years ago the railway service to the town where I live was twice as good as it is to-day. The wages of the railwaymen were in the neighbourhood of 18s. To-day there are little more than half the trains, or the trains are certainly not half as good, there are more railwaymen, and they each take more than twice the wages, with the result

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that our railways are faced with bankruptcy. A better understanding of the problem that faces them will enable the railwaymen to see that there are still higher wages to be secured from better service, but that nothing short of better service—that is, more trains, more travelling facilities, will entitle them to better things.

The sellers of labour power grossly underestimate the quality and value of the commodity which they offer. With a single mind applied to science, to efficiency, and to economy, the railways could surely be worked with fewer men at far higher wages, giving a much cheaper service. The surplus labour now forced into railways by producer-politics would find more remunerative occupation in all the activities that would arise out of proficient and economical transport facilities.

Putting all these odd points and half-baked arguments together, it is surely very hard to escape the conclusion that wisdom is only to be found in backing the consumer against the producer in the inevitable struggle between the two. An ever better civilisation can be constructed that way, and by no other. The attempt to build society in accordance with the supposed interests of producers is an attempt which is doomed from the start to failure, and which so long as it lasts must cause hardship and want.

Some of the readers of this pamphlet will grumble, and rightly grumble, that having gone to all the trouble of reading it they feel no conscious benefit. It proposes nothing; there is nothing in it which will

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enable them to go out and do something; it suggests no action; it propounds no plan. I do not apologise for it on any of these grounds. There are quite enough people in the world to-day with proposals and plans and schemes. We are overdone with reformers and organisers, and underdone with people of sufficient balance and judgment to realise the complexities of the problem and the difficulties inherent in it. We have suffered a great deal from the dangers of action founded on misunderstanding. There is never any doubt as to what is the right course for the individual. There is always grave doubt on the same question for groups of individuals, or for society as a whole. If that be true, wisdom would seem to lie in a lack of action except by individuals. That, I think, will be the tendency of the next generation or two. We have had far too much collective action and far too little encouragement for the individual. Such difficulties as beset us may be traced to these tendencies, and the hope of the future lies in a reversion of them.

“Appearances to the mind,” says Epictetus, “are of four kinds. Things either are what they appear to be, or they neither are nor appear to be, or they are and do not appear to be, or they are not and yet appear to be. Rightly to aim in all these cases is the Wise Man’s task.”

Or, as the German proverb has it, “GOD does not make out his accounts every Saturday.”

